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| **History of Softball**  Softball developed as a younger version of baseball. Softball was started by elements of other sports of which were boating, boxing and football. A boating club, a boxing glove and a football game were key parts in the very first game of softball.istory of Softball - 2 female players in the 1940's.  Softball was first introduced on Thanksgiving Day in 1887 at a Harvard-Yale football game. A man from Yale playfully threw a boxing glove at the Harvard grads after the game was done and bets were paid. A fan from Harvard hit the glove away with a broom handle. A game of indoor baseball commenced as a result. George Hancock, part of the Harvard and Yale Alumni who gathered at the Farragut Boat Club in Chicago that day to hear the score of the annual football game, made a large, soft ball by taking a boxing glove and tying it. The ball was fielded barehanded since it was soft and didn’t require gloves like those used in baseball. He did a small baseball diamond with chalk inside the boat club and the game was underway. The game lasted an hour and ended with a score of 41-40. Hancock wrote down rules and came up with a big soft ball and a bat that had a rubber tip that was good for indoors. He even painted permanent foul lines on the floor of Boat Club.  Indoor baseball became very popular in the Chicago area that winter. It was meant to be a way for baseball players to keep in practice during the winter. By 1889, a winter league was formed. When the weather became warmer, softball was taken to outdoor field (all of which were too small to be baseball fields.) The same large and soft balls that were anywhere from 10 to 20 inches in diameter that were used indoors were also used for the outdoor games. A fireman, Lewis Rober, played a very big role in developing the game. He needed something to keep his Minneapolis firemen busy while waiting for fire calls. He marked a field in a lot next to the fire station. The smaller field and softer ball used in the game of softball made meant more offense and action in the field than baseball. Rober decided to limit games to seven innings because this allowed games to be completed in an hour while being active and competitive. Contests between different firehouses began to draw as many as 3,000 spectators. By 1913, the game was officially adopted by the Minneapolis Park Board and was played in parks and on playgrounds all over the city. |
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The game that started in Chicago and Milwaukee became very popular and spread through the upper Midwest and Canada. The first softball league outside the United States was organized in Toronto in 1897. The game had many different names. It was known as a different game (popular names were cabbage ball, mush ball, or pumpkin ball,) depending on the area in which it was being played. The size of the bat and ball as well as the exact rules changed as much as the name. Men and women of every age participated in the sport. In 1931, a team of men who called themselves the Kids and Kubs traveled around the country playing softball. What made them so unique was they were all at least 75 years old and played the game in their suits. The game finally took on the name “softball” in 1926 after a Denver YMCA official brought the name up as a suggestion. Softball made a huge leap in 1933 when a reporter from Chicago and a salesman of sporting goods made a softball tournament to go along with the world’s fair. Leo Fischer (the reporter), and Michael Pauley (the salesman) invited 55 teams to compete in three tournament divisions: men’s fastpitch, men’s slowpitch (which is sixteen inch softball and is a direct descendant of Hancock’s original game does not allow defensive players to wear gloves,) and women’s. A total of more than 350,000 people watched the games at the field inside the world’s fair grounds. This tournament was what propelled softball onto the world stage. Teams, leagues and tournaments started to pop up in tons of U.S. cities and around the world. During the next seven years, it was estimated that more than five million people played softball. After World War 2, Canada soldiers introduced softball to the Netherlands. In 1939, softball was introduced to Australia. Softball was introduced to the United Kingdom in 1962 when the movie A Touch Of Class was being filmed in London. The first British women’s softball league was established in 1983.

Also as a result of the success of the tournament, the Amateur Softball Association was founded in the fall of 1933. The Association brought rules that became standardized and were needed to the game. The association set rules for different age groups because it feels that softball is a game for all ages. A 12-inch ball is the standard with a lot of youth leagues. The size of the field varies with age and between the fastpitch and slowpitch games. The pitching rubber is anywhere from 35 to 50 feet from home plate and the distance between bases ranged from 55 to 65 feet. The fastpitch game has caught the most attention internationally. A fastpitch softball pitcher can send the ball to the plate at speeds equal to those of major league baseball pitchers.

In 1977, the American Professional Slow Pitch League became the first of three men’s professional softball leagues to play between 1977 and 1982.

Since 1951, the International Softball Federation has governed worldwide softball competition. The first women’ fastpitch world championships were played in 1965 in Melbourne, Australia. The host team won the five –team competition. The US women’s team has won six out of the eight tournaments. The first men’s world championships were played a year later in Mexico City. The US men’s team won the 1966 title. Since 1970, softball world championship tournaments have been played every four years.

In 1996, women’s softball hit its highest peak when it became an Olympic medal event. The 1996 Olympics also marked a key era in the introduction of technology in softball; the IOC funded a landmark biomechanical study on pitching during the games. The US Women’s team has won all three softball gold medals awarded in the sport. The US women’s fastpitch team’s strength reflects how popular the sport is in the United States. More than 25 million people in the United States alone now actively play the game of softball. Unfortunately during the last meeting of the International Olympic Committee, held in Singapore in July 2005, softball and baseball were voted to be dropped as Olympic sports for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games.